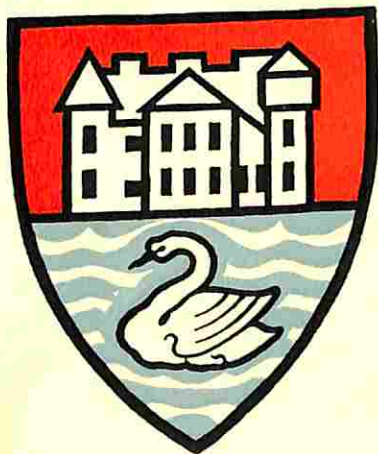


LYALL, Sir A.C.:

The Relation of Witchcraft
to Religion. 1873.

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BY

DR. GEORGE F. BLACK

THE RELATION OF WITCHCRAFT TO RELIGION.

“Witchcraft is as the sin of rebellion.”

To those who live in a country where the belief in witchcraft still pervades all classes, from highest to lowest (though of course the pressure of the superstition is far lighter upon the uppermost layers of society), the study of this delusion by autopsy of the living subject is most interesting. For we have all learnt the history of European witchcraft; how the fear of it once overspread the whole land, and faith in it was a cardinal doctrine with church and state, with kings and judges; how it gradually faded, until the notion of such a thing has at last become ridiculous to all but the most ignorant; and how this virulent mental disease was expelled, not by refutation or any special remedy, but by a gradual change in the conditions of existence which had engendered and fostered it. We know, in fact, the precise position of witchcraft under the Christian dispensation; and we understand the view taken of it by our different churches in different ages; but this essay is meant to carry the inquiry further back, and to seek for more light upon the origin and de-

velopment of the craft or practice of sorcery, by looking into its relations with the non-Christian religions, and by attempting to ascertain the place which it holds among those very superstitions with which Christians have constantly identified it.

Witchcraft has been usually supposed to be a very low and degraded phase of religion. Now this is largely true of the art in Europe, where the great Christian churches for ages combined to stamp out the relics of ancient paganism, which they denounced and furiously branded with the opprobrium of hideous sorcery, until the wretched, half-heathen serfs did actually turn devil worshipers; but the question is whether in a country that is altogether pagan, witchcraft is only one form of what we call Religion, or a different species altogether. Was there any plain distinction known among the ancient Greeks; for example, between the slaying of Iphigenia upon the altar at Aulis to obtain a fair wind, and a magical ceremony for the same object? Most people would agree that some distinction has always been recognized, though they might not find it so easy to explain. I have tried to help the explanation by carefully looking at what goes on before my eyes in India; and I fancy that I perceive a radical separation, from the very outset, between witchcraft and the humblest form of what in India is called Religion. I take witchcraft to be the aboriginal and inveterate antagonist of Religion or Theology, and hardly less so in the most primeval ages of barbarous superstition than it was in the days of our King James I. It seems to me to have arisen from an exceedingly dim and utterly confused glimpse of the secrets of Nature; to have begun with the first notion that such secrets exist and can be known, and that things which we do not comprehend may be brought to pass

without the results being inseparately connected with Divine agency. In the rudest stage of religion, the line between the most abject Fetichism—perhaps only the worship of certain queer objects—and witchcraft is very difficult to be traced by us to whom from our great intervening intellectual distance both kinds of superstition seems indistinguishable in type and character; yet even in this lowest grade of primitive society I think their separation is decipherable. For the difference between devotees and magicians, between those who propitiate gods visible or invisible, and those who use mysterious mummeries addressed to no object or subject at all, exists and can be verified from the earliest times. As a matter of fact, witchcraft is more feared and more practiced by the lowest Indian tribes than by any other classes; and though one does not at first sight perceive how they can discern or point it out to themselves, amid all the monstrous rites and grotesque terrors of their lawful beliefs, yet they always lay their finger upon it without hesitation. There seem always to have been some faint sparks of doubt as to the efficacy of prayer and offerings, and so to the limits within which deities can or will interpose in human affairs—combined with embryonic conceptions of the possible capacity of man to control or guide Nature by knowledge and use of her ways, or with some primeval touch of that feeling which now rejects supernatural interference in the order and sequence of physical processes. Side by side with that universal conviction which ascribed to Divine volition all effects that could not be accounted for by the simplest experience, and which called them miracles, omens, or signs of the gods, there has always been a remote manifestation of that less submissive spirit which locates within man himself the power of influencing things, and which works vaguely,

towards the dependence of man on his own faculties for regulating his material surroundings. Those two antagonistic ideas, of dependence on supernatural will and of independence, can, I think, be found to demarkate Witchcraft and Religion, from the Alpha down to the Omega of their long history, which is a chronicle of one incessant war, growing fiercer and fiercer as the two forces developed and became organized, and as the two principles diverged and discovered their mutual antipathy. Science had also its Fetich stage, when it consisted of unreasoning observation, and at that stage it was very much like witchcraft. * The man who first hit upon the conditions under which fire can be invariably got by rubbing sticks, probably ceased to pray for fire, as he must have prayed when the result was very uncertain; or perhaps the more reverent minds continued to rub and pray; while the bolder and busier men gradually discarded their vows as they became convinced that rubbing was alone effective. But this association of cause and effect, of rubbing sticks with fire, and the like, instead of suggesting the scientific method, only caused the undisciplined savage experimentalist to speculate rashly, to jump at most unwarrantable conclusions, and to connect together things which have no affinity whatever. The imagination of primitive man was limited or steadied by no true reasoning; one consequence was to him just as likely as another. If rubbing a stick produced fire, an utterly amazing result, without the aid of any *poogal*, sacrifice, or other invocation of gods, why should not two knives laid crossways on a threshold, or a bit of red string over the lintel of a door, bring down or avert disease? or why should not certain charms carved on the door-post make the whole house collapse? All these things are only questions of experiment, and one successful operation

goes a long way to establish confidence in yourself. If disease has once been stopped by incantation, why not always, or at least usually? Especially if a wise woman has cured an ulcer by applying a few simples, and muttering unknown words, or has averted a hail storm by hanging up mystic rags and observing the wind, there are no limits to reasonable faith in her. In this manner the first person who picked up a little physical knowledge beyond his fellows was tempted to trade upon it enormously beyond his real capital, because the boundless credulity of his neighbors inspires equal belief in himself; and if he can do one inexplicable thing he may be able to do anything else—the peculiarity of his practice being that he does everything without the aid of the gods. And this it is that makes him a Witch as distinguished from the successful propitiator of Fetich.

Witchcraft is thus supposed by me to begin when a savage stumbles upon a few natural effects out of the common run of things, which he finds himself able to work by unvarying rule of thumb. He thence infers that he has in some wonderful way imbibed extra-natural power, while he has only picked up accidentally one or two of the roughest keys which open the outer lid of the physical world. He has hit upon a rudimentary materialism; and, while he fancies himself to be entering upon a mysterious department, in which he can do without the popular Fetich, he in fact becomes a Fetich unto himself; for he thinks that the virtue lies in his own self (which is partly true), not in the essential conditions of the things which he sees and handles. His characteristic must have been always this, that he *has* some real knowledge, or faint tincture of it; and that while the vulgar crowd round him ascribe all strange coinci-

dences to the spite or favor of idols and demons, the witch makes bold to dispense with Divine intervention, and to rely on his own arbitrary tricks for producing not only a few simple effects, which he has verified, but all sorts of absurd exploits which he aims at by mere guess work; one thing being to him, I repeat, just as probable or improbable as the other. The practice and the pretensions of the sorcerer are very nearly as preposterous as those of the most impudent keeper of idols. Yet the cardinal distinction between the Fetich witch and the Fetich worshiper is the same as that between the witch and all priesthoods in all times—the former stands aloof from the ordinary adoration of supernatural powers, asking nothing from capricious gods; exercising an art for the most part as blind and irrational as rites performed to a river or a rock, but yet founded upon and clinging to the idea that his power lies *somewhere* within his own control, and is not vouchsafed by the good pleasure of the popular divinity. Fetichism is the adoration of a visible object supposed to possess active power; it ascribes, as Comte says, to all phenomena ideas of vital energy and power drawn from the human type; in short, the Fetich (a river, for instance) is a mysterious being whom you try to make friends with, as you would with a man who is plainly too strong to be frightened. But Fetichism also, as Comte further remarks, admits most slavishly that man can only hope to influence nature by worship, not by work; and it sets up an order of specialists in the business of enlisting this irresistible supernatural agency. Whereas witchcraft does after its dim, blundering fashion, from the very first stumble away in the contrary direction; in order to avert floods or attract water it does not propitiate the river god or the running stream; it employs for these purposes

some utterly random and senseless ceremony of its own devising, which nevertheless might probably be traced back with infinite trouble to some scrap of real knowledge, or traditional observation, or hap-hazard coincidence. The witch is like a savage, who might pick up a lucifer match-box, and should imagine that the power of lighting the matches was peculiar to himself; thence inferring that he was gifted with miraculous powers, and could command the lightning. He is only just superior to his fellows, who would fall down and worship the box.

A witch, therefore, may be thus defined. He is one who professes to work marvels, not through the aid and counsel of the supernatural beings in whom he believes as much as the rest, but by certain occult faculties and devices which he conceives himself to possess. In so far as he does really possess a trifling store of superior skill and useful tricks, he is the *savant* of his time; in so far as he merely pretends and guesses, he is a crazy charlatan. By applying constantly this definition we may reduce in to order our ideas of the relative position of witchcraft towards all phases of religion. First, we grasp the real distinction, even in Fetichism, between the witch and his brother practitioner upon a Fetich, or the *Shaman* who rolls about the ground and screams out his oracle; and this line between adoration, inspiration, vows, or oracles, on the one side, and thaumaturgy by occult incomprehensible *arts* on the other side, divides the two professions from bottom to top. Secondly, we see why the said witch is so furiously persecuted even in the earliest times, when there is no church to proscribe him, nor morality to denounce his ways. So long as people ascribe to their gods all inexplicable and unforeseen calamities as well as blessings, and so long as every one is allowed to worship his Fetich, spirit, or idol, after his own fashion,

the evils of superstition are confined to a few human sacrifices, whether in the way of slaying victims or of heretic burning. If these burnt offerings will not propitiate the gods there is nothing else to be done in that direction. But the pretensions of a successful witch suggest the idea that a human being, who is within reach of your hand to seize, wields mysterious power to afflict his fellow creatures; and this conviction it is which has always caused, indeed in India it still causes, horrid cruelty. While the priest, or Fetich keeper, or oracle monger, is held in reverence, as the ambassador of a power on whom it is hopeless to make war, the witch is always feared, and usually detested; because the priest disclaims all responsibility for the ills inflicted by his angry or malevolent deities, whereas the witch can be made to pay with his person. Moreover, he has also often to pay for all the shortcomings of the popular Fetich; since a priest, who has the credit of his establishment at stake, will usually attribute any failure in the efficacy of prayer, or of vows, to the malignant influence of his natural opponent, the independent witch. Among the aboriginal tribes of India any disappointment in the aid which they are entitled to expect from their gods, to avoid averting disease or famine, throws the people on the scent of witchcraft. It is too discreditable that your Fetich, after all that has been done for him in attentions, and even adulation, should have so broken down and abandoned you, as to let the cholera rage damnably, to keep your wife obstinately barren, to permit the rinderpest, or to afflict you with chronic rheumatism. But, on the part of the gods, their priest is apt to disown these untoward accidents, though he is willing carefully to absorb all blessings; and the people, immensely assisted by priestly advice, fall back on witchcraft as the only possible alternative. The thing

which torments us (they argue) is inexplicable; the only two possessors of inexplicable powers are gods and witches, the gods can't or won't help us, *argal* we must help ourselves by a hue and cry after the witches. This solution of the puzzle is easier than any speculation as to original sin, or the stain of crimes done in a previous state, or even than the anger of some strange divinity; and it is the more popular because it suggests a remedy, as all solid diagnoses of disorder ought to do. If the misfortune were the work of a god who declined to be propitiated, you could only lie flat and adore Setebos, you cannot resist or punish him; but if it is the wicked invention of a magician you can proceed at once to counteract it by torturing the inventor. Observe that the witches have themselves created the dilemma, upon one horn of which they are thus impaled, by assuming powers independent of the gods; for when a man cannot get what he wants out of a god, he is wont to consult a witch, who usually undertakes to do his bidding, and never confesses that he does not feel equal to dealing with a case. But in proportion to the popular faith in the witch as an ally must be of course the fear of him as an enemy.

Now it is worth noting, that, although among Fetichists the simple reason why a witch is persecuted, is that he is doing mischief—for otherwise there is no abstract theological objection to him—yet even in Fetichism the measures employed against him have a flavor of religion;—the gods are called into act as detectives and judges. It is public opinion that at first indicates the direction in which suspicious scrutiny should be made; the *vox populi* usually names some old woman with a smattering of simples, who has attempted to work cures. That particular combination of skill and helplessness presented by a cunning old woman seems to have always suggested

some underhand mystery to the untutored mind of the poor Indian, as of the English peasant; and besides, as I have before remarked, a woman who can cure a toothache can produce it for aught the savage can tell. In individual cases the patient himself, being sick, usually pitches upon his magic persecutor; and in any instance conjecture generally justified by consulting the professional witch-finder, who will listen to your evidence and give his authoritative opinion on your case. Prescriptions thus made up are administered by the mob. The accused is seized and subjected to experiments which appear partly intended to make him or her confess, and partly aimed at forcing the witch to break the malignant charm by incessant counter-irritation, until the evil ceases or the evil-doer dies. There is as yet no exorcism in the proper sense of the word; but these operations are conducted by the light of whatever glimpses of the supernatural may have been vouchsafed to the tribe; the use of sacred weapons against witches is already indispensable. Such weapons are indeed used by primitive man to combat troubles of every sort. I only lay stress here upon the fact because it explains what at first puzzles an investigator into the witch-finding and witch-punishing business in India—the close resemblance of the practice and methods there in use to those formerly approved by mediæval Europe. The ordeal by water is universal among the barbarous Non-Aryan tribes of Central India, from the Bheels in the west country to the wild men in the almost unexplored jungles of Bustar and the far east, towards the Bay of Bengal. Here is a description of one water test, taken a few years ago from the mouth of an expert witch-finder among the Bheels, who got into a scrape for applying it to an old woman.

“A bamboo is stuck up in the middle of any piece of

water. The accused is taken to it, lays hold of it, and by it descends to the bottom. In the meantime one of the villagers shoots an arrow from his bow, and another runs to pick it up and bring it back to the place whence it was shot. If the woman is able to remain under water until this is done, she is declared innocent, but if she comes up to breathe before the arrow is returned into the bowman's hand, she is a true witch and must be swung as such.”

In the case from which this account is taken the woman failed in the test, and was accordingly swung to and fro, roped up to a tree, with a bandage of red pepper on her eyes; but it is obvious that this kind of ordeal, like almost all primitive ordeals, is contrived so as to depend for its effect much upon the manner in which it is conducted, whereby the operator's favor becomes worth gaining.¹ A skillful archer will shoot just as far as he chooses. Ordeal by water is the question ordinary, and I understand it to be an inquiry whether the water Fetich or water spirit will accept or reject the witch, whether he is on her side or against her. I can make nothing else of this world-wide custom. Another ordeal is by heat, as for instance, the picking of a coin out of burning oil. But the question extraordinary is by swinging on a sacred tree, or by flogging with switches of a particular wood. Swinging before an idol, with a hook through the muscles of the back, is the well-known rite by which a Hindoo devotes himself to the god; and flog-

(1) Another mode of trial is by sewing the suspected one in a sack, which is let down into water about three feet deep. If the person inside the sack can get his head above water he is a witch. An English officer once saved a witch in India from ducking to death, by insisting that the witch-finder and the accusers generally should go through precisely the same ordeal which they had prescribed. This idea hit off the crowd's notion of fair play, and the trial was adjourned *sine die*, by consent.

ging with rods from a sacred tree manifestly adds superhuman virtue to the ordinary effect of a vigorous laying on. In 1865, a woman, suspected of bringing cholera into the village, was deliberately beaten to death with rods of the castor-oil tree, which is excellent for purging witchcraft. It is usual also to knock out the front teeth of a notorious witch; the practice, I conjecture, is to be connected with the world-wide belief, that witches assume animal shapes; for in India they are supposed occasionally to transform themselves into wild beasts, a superstition analogous to our European lycanthropy. A good many years ago, there was an old man "practicing as a physician," near Srinagar in the Himalayas, who was notorious as a sorcerer, inasmuch that his reputation of having devoured many persons under the form of a tiger cost him most of his teeth, which were extracted by the Rajah who then held that country, so as to render him less formidable during his constant metamorphoses. Shaving the heads of female witches is very common among the tribes much infested by sorcerers: it is employed as an antidote, not merely as a degrading punishment, so that one is tempted to trace its origin to some recondite notion of power residing in the hair; and thus even back toward Samson, to Circe with the beautiful locks, and to the familiar devils of early Christian times, who are said to have had a peculiar attachment for women with fine tresses.

Thus the frightful cruelties inflicted on witches by the wild tribes of Central India are prompted by the conviction that the power which is causing some exasperating calamity lies in the witch himself, and proceeds out of that human creature, not out of any Fetich or intangible demon. And as the evil is not from a god, therefore they use holy gear to extirpate it; but the idea of vindi-

cating the insulted majesty of deities is as yet far off, for the witch is simply a mischievous animal whom you knock on the head as you would a tiger, whenever you have hunted him down. Nor is sorcery yet regarded in the light of treason, for though the regular Obi men are indeed its ill wishers, yet this is mainly because they have to account for the prevalence of sore afflictions, and for the incompetence of their gods to apply cure after due supplication. It is therefore convenient to resolve such problems by reference to witchcraft, when all that the gods need do is to disown the accused, or to lend a hand in detecting him—for which objects and reasons the ordeals have been instituted. Sorcery is at this stage not so much an illicit irreligious trade as a wily and sinister art whereby honest men are plagued: being thus esteemed very much as law and lawyer are received by the unlearned vulgar in England and elsewhere. This is, however, its malevolent and uncanny form; on its brighter side witchcraft embodies the primitive mysteries of the art of healing, combining spells with quack medicines, the spell being what the patient mainly relies on. And as the aboriginal Indian expects the incantation to have a precise immediate effect, like a strong drug, so we may perceive the same conception inverted still moving among the peasantry of England, who talk of a dose acting "like a charm," that is, novelly and unaccountably—while the Indian employs a charm to act like a dose. Neither in England nor in India is there yet any large class of the population which has finally and firmly grasped the conclusion that a dose will act by itself, without any sort of charm or invocation whatsoever.

But just as the heavy mist which at dawn covers a primeval forest or waste fen land may be seen gradually

to rise, spread out into lighter haze, and wreath itself into various fantastic shapes, so in India the dense low-lying aboriginal Fetichism expands and tapers into higher forms. Polytheism then draws closer the broad hem of its sacerdotal phylactery, and shrinks from witchcraft with increasing antipathy. Not yet does the priest abhor or assail the witch; his prejudices carry him little beyond carefully disowning such low practitioners, and relegating sorcery outside the bounds of decent spiritualism, as a college of physicians might separate themselves from a quack. The business manifestly dispenses with the intervention of the great traditional deities, with their embodiments, ministers, rites and scriptures; it is therefore indefensible upon any orthodox scheme of religion, and it is also condemned as in effect disreputable. Moreover, as the religion of a country developes, so also does its witchcraft become modified from its earliest structure, and suffer a change of character. Its essential materialism, always unconscious and hap-hazard, easily accepts a supernatural impression; and among the Hindus proper the tricks of the primitive art or trade get incrustated over by the alluvial deposits of superstitions extinct or discarded by the predominant castes and races. Prevailing popular delusions affect even the sorcerer, so to keep up with the times he also must pretend to some backstairs interest with deities; if he is a Hindu he is often patronized by (or patronizes) some obscure, ill-conditioned god of the rudest type, who has lost all fashion under the improvement of general religious culture. His craft becomes complicated with the earlier and more discreditable rites of depressed races and superseded liturgies; so that he is less easily distinguishable than at a more simple stage. No ordinary Hindu, however, has any doubt that there is a wide gulf between a witch and a devout

person who has imbibed thaumaturgic power, though it is very difficult to hit off the popular definition; and, on the whole, it appears that one must judge of wonder-workers by their fruits, whether they be good or evil. So long as a man possessing inscrutable secrets restricts himself to useful employment of them, to the department of detecting thieves and discovering lost property, he is respected as a kind of supernatural private inquiry office and cloak-room for friends or chattels. When, however, the wise man's art takes a dark hue, and his ways are harmful, then he is at once stigmatized as a witch, and usually with accurate justice, for the sorcerer will be found to have stepped into all the scandalous business which a general advance in religious ethics may prove the gods to have abandoned. So far as he relies on any rites at all, they are connected with the worship of those Helot, or outcast tribes, which are excluded from the Brahminical temples; but his whole system escapes the control which in practice public opinion exercises over every openly-professed religion. For these reasons the witch deteriorates rapidly, and descends as polytheism rises. He is not violently persecuted by the mob or by the learned; but he holds with all classes a position which a quack of the baser sort still holds in the department of medicine. You go to such an one because he is familiar, and gives himself no airs, does not trouble himself about orthodox forms, or about the morality of means or ends, will do your work cheaply, though perchance dirtily, and will undertake operations that no respectable priest or shrine would agree to bring about by the favor of divinity. He is to be found in the back slums and *coupe gorge* alleys of superstition and of elementary physics; he dabbles largely in poisons and love philters; he can bind or loosen the *aiguillette* in a parlous manner;

and throughout he mixes up miracles with medicine after a fashion that ends later on by getting him into trouble with both camps. When his simples will not always kill or cure, he ekes them out with hideous mummery; and when that resource has failed, he has been known to perform a contract to rid you of an enemy by mere carnal assassination. He is more prone than ever to ascribe the credit of his successful cures, not to what he really knows or has done, but to his portentous gifts or to his familiar demons; whereby any rudimentary conceptions of true science are greatly hindered, for every sudden death or skillful cure is instantly set down to magic by the vulgar. The majority of witches are, it must be owned, mere cheats and swindlers; nevertheless, they appear to be the unworthy depositaries of whatever small hoard of natural magic may have been painfully secreted during long ages of soul-destroying misrule. They know some optical tricks; and the action of emotions upon the bodily organism, as in mesmerism, has been perceived and practiced from very ancient times. In the East mesmerism is pure magic; In the West it is suspicious charlatantry. Its whole history offers a good illustration of the manner in which a natural phenomenon which is obscure, uncommon, and isolated, may first be condemned as sorcery, and afterwards be repudiated as incredible; may be rejected by orthodox science as well as by orthodox religion. I suppose that the reputation of insensibility to pain possessed by witches in India as well as in Europe (where the running of pins into them was a common test), is connected with the well-known anæsthesia produced by the mesmeric trance.

It is difficult to explain, except upon the assumption that ignorant and simple imaginations all range with a very short tether over similar ground, why we find in

India the identical old English sorcerer's device of moulding an image of his doomed victim and afflicting it with pins; or wasting it in flame, in mere faith that the person imaged will bleed or pine away simultaneously. But early in this century the life of the Nizam of the Deccan (a great prince in those days) was attempted by this diabolical invention; and as the ladies of the harem were said to be at the bottom of the plot, a scandal was caused not unlike that for which the Duchess of Gloucester had to do penance, after conspiring with sorcerers to remove Henry VI. by this very trick of an infernal doll shaped in the likeness of majesty. Not long ago, one partner in a respectable commercial firm in one of the great Indian cities applied to a reputed sorcerer for his aid in removing another partner; but the sorcerer, who was merely an honest leech, preferred to collude with the threatened partner to cheat the would-be murderer out of heavy fees, the conjurer performing the wax-doll rites, while the victim pretended mysterious ailments and a general sense of vital exhaustion.

The Banjaras of Central India, who formerly carried all the grain traffic of the country on vast droves of bullocks, are terribly vexed by witchcraft, to which their wandering and precarious existence especially exposes them in the shape of fever, rheumatism, and dysentery. Solemn inquiries are still held in the wild jungles where these people camp out like gypsies, and many an unlucky hag has been strangled by sentence of their secret tribunals. In difficult cases they consult the most eminent of their spiritual advisers or holy men, who may be within reach; but it is usual, as a proper precaution against mistakes which even learned divines may commit, to buy some trifling article on the road to the consultation, and to try the diviner's faculty by making him guess

what it was, before proceeding to matters of life or death. The saint works himself into a state of demoniac possession, and gasps out some woman's name; she is killed by her nearest relative, or allowed to commit suicide, unless indeed her family are able to make it worth the diviner's while to have another fit, and to detect some one else. Observe, that though the witch and the witch-finder are in these transactions both on precisely the same level of darkest and deepest superstition, yet that the two professions are entirely distinct and mutually opposed. The Banjaras are in no sense an aboriginal tribe.

I find, therefore, that witchcraft has always been a separate art and calling side by side with the stewardship of divine systems, but apart from it. Also, that the most primitive witchcraft looks very like medicine in an embryonic state; but as no one will give the aboriginal physician any credit for cures or chemical effects produced by simple human knowledge, he is soon forced back into occult and mystic devices which belong neither to religion nor to destiny, but are a ridiculous mixture of both, whence the ordinary kind of witchcraft is generated. Now its progressive degradation as a science may be measured by the gradual elevation of its two original ingredients—of the religious sentiment, and (much later) of real experimental knowledge. In polytheism it is the relative, upward growth of morality, and of popular conceptions of the divine nature, which depress witchcraft to a lower level of public esteem. A higher idea of the functions of divinity usually coincides with a more restricted idea of their employment; and the notion is soon developed of gods interfering mainly on the side of virtue (except where their own majesty or

privileges are concerned), and even then only on important occasions. So soon as men come to presume gods to be incapable of gross injustice, of unprovoked cruelty, or of wanton malice, they impute to the witch every sudden misfortune, like apoplexy or paralysis, that befalls a blameless man or beast. In an earlier intellectual state, vicious cruelty is not incompatible with the character of a Fetich or vengeful goddess who has been introduced to Hinduism by Brahmanized Fetich worshippers; but with the milder polytheism of Hindus proper, the practice of using mighty power to do evil ceases to be approved as a godlike characteristic, and thus becomes discreditable; while even to do good the great deities are reluctant to interpose, save when the knot is worthy to be loosed by divine fingers. *De minimis non curant*; they will bestow a victory or a pestilence, but for petty blessing or cursing there is a tendency towards the Epicurean theosophy. Nevertheless, since the peculiar need of the primitive mind is to insist upon a religious or supernatural causation for all queer, unaccountable facts, insomuch that to such minds the miraculous explanation is, as Grote remarks, the rational one; therefore the vulgar polytheists still cling obstinately to witchcraft as their easiest interpretation of phenomena for which their inferior gods decline to be responsible, as their readiest source for the remedies which Heaven will no longer undertake to provide, and man has not yet tried to discover. The great plagues, like cholera or small-pox, still belong to the gods, who personally inflict and can therefore remove them; but as the nobler Hindu deities rise higher towards the clouds above, and gradually melt away into abstractions, they deign less and less to trouble themselves with trivial grievances or

animosities, or to bow down their ear to the lamentation and ancient tale of wrong which comes ever steaming up from the much-enduring tillers of Indian soil. The consequence is that all dirty squabbles, and the criminal side of miraculous business generally, are gradually made over to witches; and the earlier habit of attributing malignant, monkey-like tricks to your god, or of expecting trifling services from him, is discouraged and disowned by the priests as inconsistent with the dignity of their cultus. You cannot expect a great incarnation of Vishnu to cure your cow, or find your lost purse; nor will public opinion tolerate your going to any frequented temple or shrine with a petition that your neighbor's wife, his ox, or his ass may be smitten with some sore disease. You will not find a respectable minister to take an offering or to use his influence in such silly and scandalous jobs with any saint or deity who values his self-respect.

It must be remembered, also, that the upper sort of polytheistic priest very rapidly hardens down into a mechanical master of ceremonies, the rigid expounder of accredited traditional religion; and that under this process of change he is apt to transfer even his mantic office, the expounding of occasional marvels, to astrologers, soothsayers, convulsionists, and the like—a class which in all its branches must be distinguished, in India, from the magicians proper. Astrologers, fortune-tellers by sortilege, and interpreters by dreams or omens, all swarm throughout India, but all these watch nature in order to ascertain the will and intention of the gods; whereas, I define a witch to be one who works independently of them. The witch has originally, I imagine, nothing at all to do with the Mantis; though it is easy to see how

they came to be confounded during the first centuries of the Christian era in Europe.

Yet I must not be supposed to assert that even the uppermost gods of Hinduism have retired behind mere ceremonial altars, like constitutional monarchs; on the contrary, I say that all still take active interest in the well-being of their worshipers, some working by laws as loftily as any mortal Indian executive, and are therefore as well worth propitiation. But I mean that there are many grades of accessibility among them, from Brahma—who since he created the world has taken no further trouble about it, and having got quite above his everyday business is very properly rewarded by possessing only one out of the million temples to Hindu gods—down to the lowest pettifogging deity to whom nothing comes amiss by way of a *douceur*. One of this last sort may often be stumbled upon enshrined in deep jungle by some lonely cross-road or choked-up well; a low caste illiterate hedge-priest presides, who with fearsome ritual doth immolate a young pig before a clay image daubed with red paint. The man is a scandal to Brahmanism, and only distinct from Fetichism because the image probably represents some utterly obscure saint or hero of the spot; but he is not a witch. This hedge-priest serves his god or devil, whereas a witch makes the familiar demon, if one is kept, serve *him*. Now polytheism is so tolerant that it allows a man to apply at discretion to any of its deities, and perhaps he may begin with his suit to the highest class of them, on the principle of always dealing, where possible, with the heads of departments. But if a man does not get his remedy there, he obviously goes elsewhere. He will generally try some god of local reputation and fair fame; failing these he will resort to miraculous shrines

and far-famed places of pilgrimage. Thence he may come down for relief to living men—to ecstasies, ascetics, and saints marvelously gifted or afflicted; or he may take a step even lower, and consult inspired Shamanists who have the divine afflatus constantly laid on, and screech out their oracle in a frenzy; but here he is arriving at the last stage of legitimate research into the supernatural. Beyond this line a moral man will not venture in pursuit of his object, if it is one of which he is not ashamed; for if he proceeds further he has left the region of divinity, and has got among the witches. He will only do this if his need be very trifling, such as the cure of a beast or the finding of a coin, or if it be evil and criminal,—saving only the exceptional case, when he being himself manifestly vexed by a witch, is justified according to common opinion, in seeking to employ the *lex talionis*. Here begins the black art proper, of which, if we may judge by study of its practices from real life in India, we must own that our ancestors may have had very good reasons for persecuting it, though they proceeded on grounds widely mistaken, and very often against the wrong persons. In any decent condition of society the sorcerers have subsided for the most part to the level of knaves and cheats, religiously and medically. Obviously the wide-spread popular detestation of witchcraft was against its evil ways, and a great part of its ill-fame was quite separate from the theologic prejudices against black and white magic in-

(1) These professional convulsionists used to be notorious for oracular powers upon the Malabar coast, where their custom was to work themselves into violent hysterics, when they thundered out curses or prophecies, as the occasion required. Formerly they were much employed, after the fashion of Balak, for political purposes; but their inspiration was often of the kind that is still supposed to stimulate the hysterical utterances of a London paper—a strong partiality for the ministry of the day.

discriminately, which the Catholic Church very consistently entertained.

It is among the Mussulmans that we find, as might be expected, the first distinct expression of religious condemnation of all magic as a sin, because it is treason against God. Sorcery of all kinds is known and incessantly practiced. Much business is done in amulets, charms, spells, exorcism, magic mirrors, cabalistic figures, divination, sortilege, and the like; nor do the common people curse a magician unless his dealings or deeds be wicked. The magician of Islam is he who hath power over the genii, or over fairies, and who will cast out devils by magic circles and incantations not known to the orthodox rubric for that end provided, and who is also well furnished with talismans for causing a devil to enter your body. Then there is the minor sorcerer, who helps you to captivate women, to discover thieves, or to find out what your absent friends are about by the aid of the magic mirror. I fancy that the magic mirror, so famous in the mediæval romance of western Europe, whereby an honest crusader often caught most discomfiting glimpses of his domestic interior, must have been imported from the East in those ages. It will be remembered that Lane, in his "Modern Egyptians," gives a minute description of this kind of magical feat, and that in "Eothen" Mr. Kinglake relates a ludicrous failure by the conjurer whom he desired to summon Dr. Keats, of Eton. In India the conjurer polishes with some black oily paste a child's hand; charms are muttered while the child stares steadily at the bright surface, and describes the visions which successively pass across it. It is worth noting that the image of a broom sweeping the ground which, according to Lane, frightened a young Englishwoman who allowed the mirror to be pre-

pared in her hand, appears to be in India also, the apparition which the mirror-holder ordinarily begins by describing. There may be something in Lane's remark that the whole process reminds him of animal magnetism.

But all these arts are denounced by rigid Mussulman divines, especially by the Wahabi sect, whose distinctive theologic note is great jealousy of any encroachment upon the centralized unity of Divinity. Magic, say the more liberal doctors, is a concealed power, which is given to some men for profession and use, just as a sword is a visible instrument which some get hold of and learn to use; and, as with arms, so with magic, the only question should be whether it is employed for good or for ill. If a man devotes himself to the study of these abstruse and powerful arts, he may acquire the thaumaturgic faculty and may extort obedience from genii; but he must wield his authority for right ends. He may succeed in commanding the evil genii to do him all kinds of wicked service, but then he is practicing black, or *Satanic* magic. The story of one Shah Darval is famous in Central India; indeed it belongs to a kind famous throughout the world,—the legend of a man who has obtained possession, usually by chance or trick, of a power which is too strong for him to manage. Shah Darval, was groom to a great magician of the Michael Scott type, who, lying on his death-bed, felt himself passing away at an hour when all his disciples were absent. The only person who heard the magician's call was this poor horse boy, who brought him water, so to him did the wizard impart the secret spell, which bound two genii to serve him. But Shah Darval could handle his magic no better than the Dwarf in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel;" some say he did some awful crime, others, that he broke the vow of chastity on which his power depended; anyhow his

genii soon tore him to pieces, and he is a wandering demon to this day.¹ Of course the ordinary moral lesson against abuse of great gifts may be pointed by this legend; but it might also be imagined to be a faint and far distant reverberation of the despairing voice of some ancient seeker after knowledge, who has caught just a glimpse of what will be known after his time, dying in the dark ages, surrounded by fanatics and poor fools like Shah Darval, with the miserable certainty that his few discoveries must perish with him, and that his name will be lost among a crowd of barbarous conjurers.

The stricter doctrines of Islam approach Christianity in their entire condemnation of all curious arts. According to them magic is *Shirk*, a word which literally means partnership; and secondarily, a sort of polytheism. As applied to magic, the term may imply the admission of other supernatural beings into partnership with the miraculous powers that are God's attribute; or with the rigid Unitarians it would mean that the magician himself becomes an apostate and a renegade, by arming himself rebelliously with weapons that belong by prerogative to God alone. And in this latter definition we find again the idea which is the spinal column of witchcraft; for the essence of magic, as distinguished from miracles, is in Islam that it is performed without calling on God's name, and without ascribing to Him glory for the deed; which, if the deed be evil or foolish, cannot of course be done. And so we come round again to our aboriginal

(1) A similar legend, widely spread over a vast tract of country, is that of Hemar Punt, by some identified with Hemadri, an authentic physician of the ninth century. He, too, found himself obliged to keep his demons employed, and he set them to build temples with huge stones without mortar. The demons finished them all in one night, and their ruins, called by the profane ancient Hindoo architecture, are to be seen all over the Dekhan to this day.

definition of witchcraft,—that it is a marvelous art independent of popular theology, and therefore disowned by it in every stage of belief. Nevertheless not even among Mohammedans is sorcery really laid under such uncompromising proscription as was imposed upon it by the furious persecution of the old Catholic Church in Europe, which established so crushing a monopoly of miracles that even scientific discoveries and harmless tricks were put down as a breach of it. Whereas the respectable Indian world in general is of *Ralpho's* opinion in *Hudibras*, that “the Saints have freedom to go to sorcerers if they need ‘em,” and that by “subtle stratagem,” to make use of the devil for innocent ends is no sin at all. In India we have no trace of that queer twist given by mediæval Christianity to the primitive mental habit of adoring what is unintelligible, which makes the ignorant European still ascribe odd things to the devil, and which brought down the ban of all churches upon any strange gifts displayed by men, so that contraband prodigies were suppressed as the Excise now hunts down stills.¹ No one, not even the soundest Mussulman divine, will in India take the trouble actively, to molest a witch who has not meddled with him or his.

It is probable that in no other time or country has witchcraft ever been so comfortably practiced as it is now in India under British rule. In Europe it has always been either persecuted or ridiculed; and its worst sufferings must have been during that period when the

Church insisted that belief in witchcraft was an essential dogma, and stamping it out a primary duty. To disbelieve in its supernatural existence was almost as bad as to practice it, wherefore between the two millstones of hard-set credulity and savage animosity the witch was brayed as in a mortar. Now, though in India every one believes in witchcraft as a fact, yet there is here no church foreseeing dimly that faith in witchcraft is an outwork of its own miraculous evidences, and that unfaith may be, as *Glanvil* logically calls it, an insidious sapping of all belief in the supernatural. Thus his countrymen are not bound to prosecute the Indian sorcerer on religious grounds; while he lives under laws which, instead of condemning him, interfere actively to protect him from molestation, and are much more prone to hang witch-finders than witches. Of course the witch is punished when he takes to poisoning or pure swindling; but, so long as his modes of influence are metaphysical, so long as he keeps to sticking pins in a wax figure, brewing in a cauldron, burying a fowl head downwards, howling out incantations, and the like, it is not easy for an English judge to punish the man because he can make his neighbors believe that these operations affect the climate or the health of any one against whom they are directed. The Penal Code does indeed contain one section that might reach witches;¹ but then it might, under a similar construction, reach also the priests of all the recognized religions in India, which would be inconvenient. As a matter of fact, this section merely continues the ancient oriental distinction between black and

(1) Section 508. It punishes the causing a person to do or omit anything, by inducing him to believe that he will be rendered, by some act of the offender, an object of divine displeasure.

(1) *Tavernier*, who visited India in the 17th century, relates how, being at an English settlement, he saw that celebrated trick of the Indian jugglers—the causing of a mango tree to grow from a slip in half an hour. He says that an English minister, who was present, declared that he would refuse the communion to any man who looked on at such devilry, and so broke up the gathering.

white magic ; for while it forbids the threatening of evil, it does not prohibit the promise of good, though one can be no more an imposture than the other. In every village of Central India they keep a hereditary servant, whose profession is to ward off impending hailstorms by frightful noises, by consulting the motion of water in certain pots, and by dancing about with a sword. If he threatened to bring down the hail, he would be "tunded" as a witch by the public, and imprisoned as an intimidator by the magistrate ; but as his intentions are beneficent, he is encouraged and supported. But if we concede that to menace bodily harm or material mischief by the most absurd devices is clearly punishable, we find it much more difficult to settle how far we are to take legal notice of threats of divine displeasure that may show itself, like small-pox, in very substantial form. Yet if India be shortly endowed with that free representation which certain Englishmen desire immediately to bestow upon her, it is pretty certain that the anti-Brahminical candidate at a Banares election will some day find that his voters and their female relatives are being intimidated as to their future fate, by predictions of a kind which will far exceed in strength and force of graphic detail the most fervent anathemas of the Galway priests.

The witch is, however, a much more unmanageable subject for modern governments than the Indian priest, because his delusions are more gross and palpable. So long as he keeps to white, or even to grayish magic, it would be unfair to prosecute him hastily, because he is a bit of an impostor. He is not much worse than the quacks who still, in law and in medicine, administer senseless, obsolete formulas, which they put in motion

like a spell, to kill or cure by hap-hazard, or to ruin a man technically against all reason. And I return to the point at which I began when I say that even the most grotesque and ridiculous operations of witchcraft, the method of divining the course of a hailstorm by looking at water in a row of pots, for instance, may possibly contain the germ or hidden kernel of some real observation. At any rate, the practice seems to me to stimulate the spirit of observation and induction more than the mere watching of signs and omens, or sacrifices to gods ; though Comte believes that these things stimulated early physical inquiry. Chance and strangeness are the very essence of an omen ; whereas sorcery pretends to be an exact science. And from this point of view it might possibly be affirmed that even the poor aboriginal witch of the jungles, with all his sins and disreputable hocus-pocus, is in his time and generation persecuted, like Paracelsus and Cornelius Agrippa, mainly on account of his singularity and of his relative superiority. He is making a first step, however stumbling and unconscious, upon a road which may lead him away from abject prostration before the idols and phantasms which overawe his world ; or, if he hath a devil, it is his own familiar, rather his servant than his master, not the tyrannous hobgoblin that overawes the crowd. He is just touching, though he may only touch and let go, a line of thought which points, albeit vaguely and most crookedly, towards something like spiritual and mental independence ; whereas his Fetichist brethren are only just setting forth into that interminable labyrinth of speculation as to invisible and preternatural personalities which at last threatens to lead the foremost of modern Hindus—after ages of wandering in the waste ocean of their theology ;

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